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# Hunting Worlds Turned Upside Down

## Paulus Potter's *Life of a Hunter*\*

Piers Beirne & Janine Janssen

When asked by one of the editors of this special issue to consider submitting an essay on the significance to cultural criminology of a certain seventeenth-century Dutch painting that we had pointedly brought to his attention, one of us happily replied that we would attempt it. As likely authors, however, we soon began to mutter to ourselves that for our purposes, we were unable to distinguish with much satisfaction between cultural criminology, green criminology<sup>1</sup> and visual criminology.<sup>2</sup> We remain unable to do so. This seems not least because on numerous points and issues – power, inequality, spectacle, exclusion and suffering, for example – the chosen concepts and concerns of each of these evolving perspectives intersect with and blend into those of the other two.

To the emerging perspective of what its exponents have recently dubbed a 'green-cultural criminology' (Brisman & South, 2013), this essay seeks to add an exploratory historical case study of 'the visual': *Life of a Hunter* (c. 1647-1650) by the Dutch painter Paulus Potter. In keeping with the spirit of Brisman and South's consideration of 'the cultural significance of the environment' (2013: 130 [emphasis in original]), our aim here is to examine how, on occasion, the production and consumption of a certain image simultaneously manages to reflect the prevailing cultural standards of an era and to show the way to their erosion and possible transcendence. In approaching our task, we are also motivated by a shared interest in the current movement towards a nonspeciesist criminology.<sup>3</sup> (By 'nonspeciesism' we refer to and embrace what is surely one of the most daunting tasks facing criminology, namely, disengagement from the historical dominance of human interests over those of animals in discourses of abuse, cruelty and harm.)

### Introduction

It is well established that discursive innovations in literature, philosophy and perhaps also in the graphic arts encouraged pro-animal sentiments in seventeenth and eighteenth century England (see Beirne, 2013). In this essay, we would like to suggest that among certain Golden Age artists in The Netherlands there was also something that may be called an 'animal turn' and that this was possibly encour-

\* For their help with various aspects of this paper, the authors are especially grateful to Willem de Haan, Martin Kemp, Daan Driessen, Marrigje Rikken and the journal's anonymous reviewers.

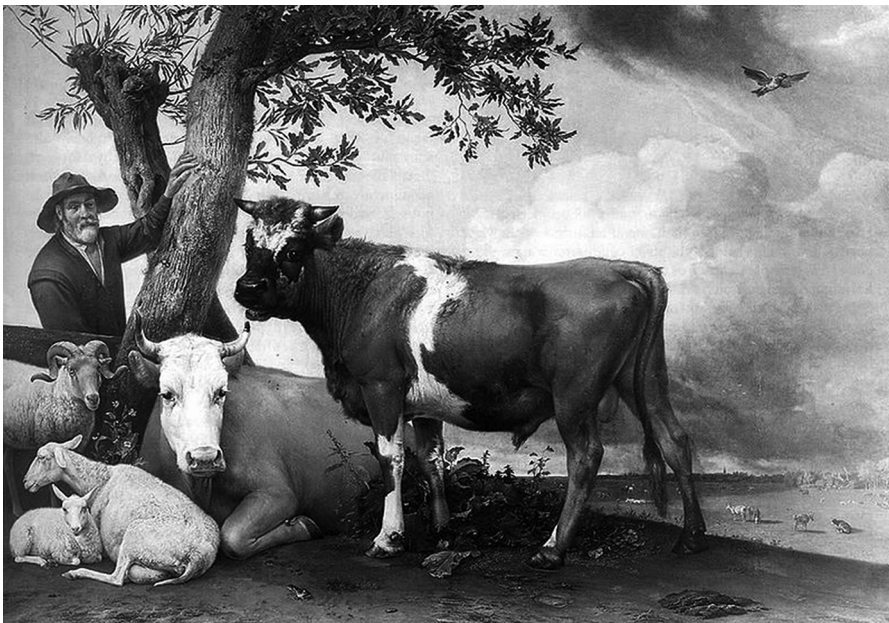
1 On some of the key aspects of green criminology, for example see Beirne & South, 2007; South & Brisman, 2014; Stretesky, Long & Lynch, 2014; White, 2013; and Wyatt, 2013.

2 For example, see Beirne, 2013; Brown, 2009; Carrabine, 2011, 2012; and Janssen, 2008, 2012.

3 For example, see Beirne, 2009; and Sollund, 2008.

aged by the pro-animal sentiments expressed in the writings of Michel de Montaigne.

What is currently known as the Golden Age in Dutch history, between c. 1570-1650, was a period of unusual transformation in the relationship between Dutch society and animals. We believe that for animals, this multi-faceted realignment included the upwardly spiralling vicious cycle entailed in the construction of menageries, the rise of scientific experimentation and the increasing tendency toward pet-keeping, to name a few examples. Attached to these new fashions was the emergence of a demand for artistic representations of landscapes with animals. A chief characteristic of this art is the tendency toward life-like depictions of horses and sheep, at pasture or grazing in a meadow. Berchem, van de Velde, Cuyper, Potter and Wouwerman all laboured on this topic. This is not to imply that when viewers looked at pictures of landscapes they made no associations between what they saw on the canvas and what they saw in life: horses, oxen and cows in a meadow were probably associated with wealth and fertility, for example, dogs with loyalty, and the interior of a stable with Christmas (Chong, 1988; Davids, 1989; Wolloch, 2006: chapter 6). In The Netherlands cattle were also represented in political prints, as a reference, for example, to the importance of the dairy industry for the considerable wealth in the Low Countries. It was not uncommon for political processes to be expressed in images of wheeling and dealing at cattle markets (Chong, 1988).



1. *Paulus Potter, The Young Bull (c. 1647)*

Although at first sight, their representational accuracy seemed to be their chief quality, the paintings depicting animals often held various symbolic meanings as

well. Indeed, in addition to their novel appearance in Golden Age lifelike landscapes, animals also frequently appeared in a second strand favoured by certain Dutch and Flemish painters. This was the genre painting devoted to subjects from everyday life, by artists such as Adriaen van Ostade and the Flemish artists David Teniers and Pieter Brueghel the Elder and Jan Brueghel the Elder. Known for their rowdy scenes, these painters portrayed common folk going about their daily business in ordinary places such as taverns, surgeries, cobbler shops and meeting-houses. There was much irreverence in these scenes, with ale aplenty and much urine spilled.

One feature in Flemish art, the placing of animal heads on human bodies and vice versa, was used especially in works of social commentary and political satire (Antal, 1962: 61–62). A famous example of this tendency to satyr satire, set in the context of contemporary debates about the nature of the five senses, is Jan Brueghel the Elder and Peter Paul Rubens' *Allegory of Sight* (1617). This depicts a monkey, holding spectacles, peering at a painting. What the artists thereby seem to suggest is that, with or without spectacles, monkeys look but are incapable of seeing. A monkey could never comprehend such an image, so the argument goes, because only humans have the ability to think rationally and to see and think clearly. Another example is a painting by Jan Brueghel the Younger, *Satire on Tulip Mania* (c.1640). Brueghel's *Satire* lampoons the speculative bubble around tulip investing, which had burst in 1637, leaving many speculators ruined. It depicts the tulip investors as monkeys who, needless to say, lack adequate or proper intelligence; see also Brueghel's *Persiflage of the Tulipomania* (c. 1630), which depicts a monkey urinating on two tulips.<sup>4</sup>

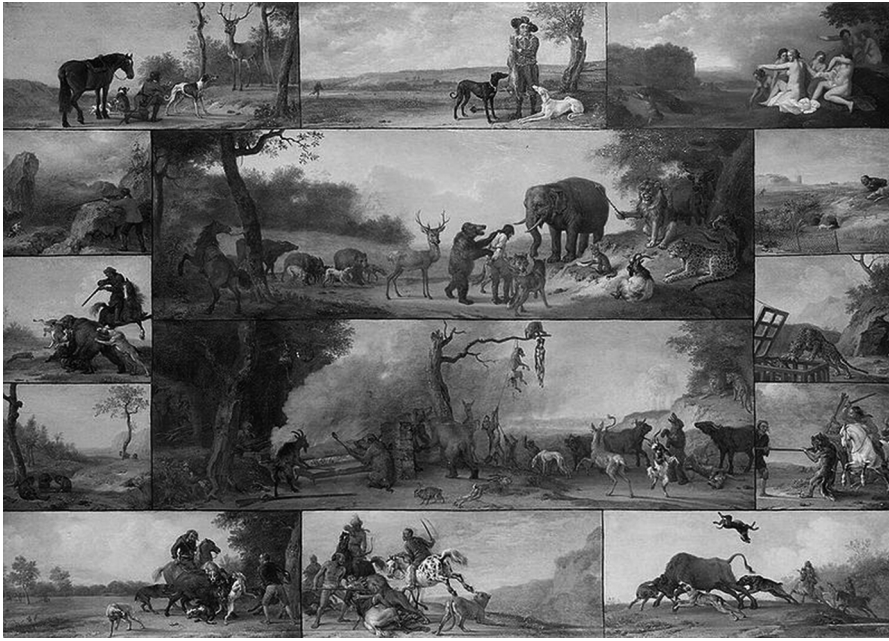
What follows in this essay is an attempt to understand *Life of a Hunter*, an extraordinary if rather obscure painting executed at some point between 1647 and 1650, by the young Dutch artist Paulus Potter (1625-1654). Nowadays adorning a wall in the Hermitage museum in St. Petersburg, *Life of a Hunter* boasts fourteen rectangular panels and multiple narratives, all appearing on a canvas measuring only 411 mm × 809 mm (16.18" × 31.8"). It has been described by Goethe as 'a poem in paint' (cited in Walsh, Buijsen & Broos, 1994: 127) and by the eminent art historian Martin Kemp as 'among the most remarkable of all animal "histories" from any period' (2007: 101).

### An Unlikely Tale

To anyone interested in the historical development of sentiments that are at once against cruelty and pro-animal, *Life of a Hunter* is a confrontational, centuries-old

4 See also *De Allegorie van Prins Maurits en Johan van Oldenbarnevelt* (c. 1620), a painting by the brothers Herman and Cornelis Saftleven that depicts Groenestijn castle near Baarn. In *The Allegorie* the Republican van Oldenbarnevelt – depicted as a wise owl – is chased from his castle by a mounted knight, who is meant to be Maurits, Prince of Orange. This is quite a message in itself. Moreover, in the foreground are two crested fowls, who likely symbolise the Nobility, who refrained from intervention in the acute conflict about state governance which led to van Oldenbarnevelt's death.

shocker. It depicts a hunter who has been captured by animals, condemned to death, roasted alive and then no doubt consumed by the very creatures who had earlier been his quarry. *Life of a Hunter* provokes several all-too-obvious questions, first and foremost: what does *Life of a Hunter* mean to Potter and to his spectatorship?



## 2. Paulus Potter, *Life of a Hunter* (c. 1647-1650)

In order to begin to piece together the meaning of *Life of a Hunter*, one has to enter its world through the prism of the ancient Greek myth of Diana and Actaeon. This particular myth was popularized by the Roman poet Ovid in his narrative poem *Metamorphoses*, which goes as follows. A young man named Actaeon, the grandson of Cadmus, is hunting deer in a forest. While engaged in this pursuit, he unwittingly stumbles across Diana, the goddess of the hunt. She, naked and chaste, is attended by an escort of nymphs while she bathes in a spring. The nymphs try to shield the embarrassed Diana from the gaze of the lovestruck Actaeon. As punishment for his transgression, Diana throws water at Actaeon, deprives him of speech and turns him into a deer – a stag with huge antlers. Actaeon flees the scene, afraid. Eventually, he is chased down by his own dogs and fellow hunters. Actaeon the deer is not recognized as Actaeon the man. To the encouragement of his unsuspecting friends, fifty of his own hunting dogs rip Actaeon to pieces.

As they have been handed down from one storyteller to another and travelled from one culture to another, the plot and the cast of characters in Ovid's myth of Diana and Actaeon have been endlessly reimagined. At times, Ovid's creation has



been conflated with and then blended into new myths and legends, notably those surrounding the grisly deaths of Catholic martyrs. Painters and sculptors, too, have represented one or another version of Ovid's myth, most famously, perhaps, *The Death of Actaeon* (c. 1562) by Titian. One of the most dramatic paintings of the Ovidian myth is the anonymous mural *The Legend of St. Eustace* (c. 1480). Set on a wall panel in Canterbury cathedral in Kent, eastern England, this complex painting has a convoluted narrative, each of whose several scenes lurches forwards or sideways and then disappears into the narrative of other stories. At the bottom of the painting is an image of the stony-faced Roman general Placidus, in the service of the second-century emperor Trajan. While out hunting deer, Placidus has a vision – he sees the crucified Christ between the antlers of a large stag. At once persuaded to convert from paganism to Christianity, Placidus adopts the new name Eustace. His new faith puts Eustace to several tests, including, ultimately, an order by the emperor Hadrian that after a Roman military victory he must perform a customary pagan sacrifice. Refusing Hadrian's demand, Eustace, his wife and his sons are entombed alive by their executioners in a brazen bull. They are then roasted to death.

Paulus Potter's *Life of a Hunter* tells the tale of a well-heeled gentleman who likes to hunt and to kill 'game' and 'exotic' animals. In ten of the panels, each set around the margins of the painting, the well-outfitted hunter is depicted in the act of hunting, shooting with gun or bow, trapping and spearing his chosen prey. Moving downwards on the right, across the bottom and ascending to the left, we gaze successively at the hunter's pursuits. Some of his activities are quite explicit. Others are harder to interpret. As follows, they are:

- The lower-right panel represents a bull at the moment he is set upon by four of the hunter's dogs. Their lunges and fangs the bull resists with great vigour. But from this picture one cannot tell whether the hunter's intention is to kill the bull or to bait him and thus allow him to escape for another occasion. Perhaps, instead, the baiting is an exercise in softening the bull's flesh prior to feasting on him.
- In other panels of *Life of a Hunter*, aside from shooting at what appear to be native deer and native boars, the hunter is also portrayed in search of exotic quarry. In one panel, for example, the lower middle, he attempts to kill two lions. He is assisted in this pursuit by a turbaned Indian archer and hunting dogs. One of the dogs is mauled by a lion and heaved into the air. In the lower left a lion tries to pull the hunter from his horse. Other scenes portray the hunter, variously trying to catch a bear, a troupe of monkeys and a leopard.
- In the scene at the top centre the hunter displays a freshly caught hare. This animal he has managed to kill with the use of two greyhounds. The painter has probably added these dogs as they were often specially trained for hunting small game.
- In two of the top panels Potter begins to draw in the viewer to the heart of the story. In these panels the myth of Diana and Actaeon is merged with the legends of St. Eustace and of St. Hubertus, the seventh-century bishop of

Liège and the patron saint of hunters in that region. In the right-hand panel, the naked Diana, accompanied by her female escorts, has been seen bathing by Potter's seventeenth-century hunter. He is visible in the distance, fleeing the scene and wearing a set of deer's antlers as punishment for his transgression.

- In the next, left-hand scene the hunter is entranced by the vision of a stag between whose antlers appears a crucifix. (Though Potter's art began with a certain number of the various animal symbols associated with Judeo-Christianity, these aspects had dwindled or else were disguised during the early 1640s, as the artist tried to represent real animals in his work.) The hunter has dismounted from his horse and is caught in the act of genuflecting before the stag. In the lower section of this panel appear the initials 'C.P.' These signify Cornelis van Poelenburgh (c. 1594-1667), the well-known Utrecht painter who specialized in biblical or mythical narratives superimposed on Mediterranean landscapes populated only by the occasional small human figures (see Walsh, Buijsen & Broos, 1994: 127-128; and Kemp, 2007: 101-102; see also Potter's *Capturing Monkeys*). One assumes that this Ovidian characterization must actually not have been painted by Potter himself but by van Poelenburgh.
- In the two-panel panorama at the centre of *Life of a Hunter*, the tables have been turned on the hunter. Animals have captured him and his two dogs. But instead of indulging in the sport of hunting and killing, they have put the hunter on trial. Presumably, he is charged with the serious crime of having hunted, killed and eaten animals. To the right, a lion presides over the affair. A fox records the proceedings. Officers of the court include a stag, a bear and two wolves, who surround the hunter, and a boar, a fox and an elephant, who stand guard and watch. The hunter himself, standing, arms tied behind his back, bows his head before the authority of the court.
- In the final panel it is clear that the verdict of the court is: Guilty! Sentence: Death! Two of the hunter's dogs have been strung up on a tree limb. The dogs dangle, limp and expired, hanged by a noose around each of their necks. A third dog awaits a similar end. To the left, the naked hunter is roasted on a flaming spit. Nearby lies his gun, on the ground and impotent. A goat and a bear baste the hunter, turning him over the fire. The animals dance and prance and howl with joy.

### A Satire on Early Modern Animal Trials?

In what follows we ask: What did *Life of a Hunter* signify to Paulus Potter? When and where did this viewpoint originate?

Potter doubtless possessed from an early age a talent for the representation of animals. It can confidently be said that it is his landscape paintings which give animals the most prominence, while the presence of humans is limited to the odd farmer or milkmaid. At work in The Hague, he lived only a few metres from meadows, so did not have to walk far in order to see cattle. Indeed, the animal paint-

ings undertaken in his studio were inspired by sketches he had made during his walks in the outdoors (Buijsen, Dumas et al., 1998). From 1643 onwards, he only depicted the animals and people that he had encountered, or imagined that he had encountered, in his immediate geographic vicinity.

In the course of his short life, Potter depicted animals in almost one hundred paintings and in even more drawings and etchings. (He died of tuberculosis in Amsterdam in 1654, aged 29.) Among his most notable works are *Wild Boar Hunting in a Forest* (1641); *The Young Bull* (1647); *Cattle and Sheep in a Stormy Landscape* (1647); *Figures with Horses by a Stable* (1647); *Cows Reflected in the Water* (1648); and *The Bear Hunt* (1649). In each of these pictures animals are the chief focus. Each of their titles reflects the fact that, for whatever reason and endowed with whatever authorial intent, Potter's enduring artistic interest was the representation of animals and of our relationships with them.

In trying to explain why Potter paid such frequent and so detailed attention to animals, some art historians have suggested that perhaps he simply had, or thought that he had, greater talent for painting animals (e.g., Buijsen, Dumas et al., 1998). In other descriptions of the stylistic development of his work, it has been said that he started to depict animals in order to connect the foreground of his compositions to their backgrounds. Thus, some animals he pictured staring far off into the distance, while others look the viewer directly in the eye (Walsh, 1994). In so doing, it has been claimed, Potter managed to present animals as individuals with distinct personalities (Von Arps-Aubert, 1932). In this regard, consider Potter's best-known work, *The Young Bull* (c. 1647). Standing in The Hague's Mauritshuis before this large canvas – it measures 7ft 10" × 11ft 4" – it is easy to recognize the painter's attempt at suggesting lifelikeness. The animal makes eye contact. Admire also the flies around his head and the small frog on the ground.

But *Life of a Hunter* has a special place in Potter's *oeuvre*. It screams out, so to speak, for further interpretation. It has the look of a cartoon, its exotic animals not well executed. Reading backwards from completed canvas to Potter's intentions – a hazardous journey even in the best of circumstances – one must believe that the work of the Flemish painter and engraver Theodoor Galle was a major source of inspiration for *Life of a Hunter*. Galle's engraving *The Revenge of the Animals* (c. 1600), for example, shows the trial and roasting of a hunter and his dogs by a variety of animals, including hares, boars, deer, a lion and a fox (and see Walsh, Buijsen & Broos, 1994: 130). Moreover, Galle's *Discovery of America* (c. 1630, after a drawing of 1575 by Jan van der Straet in Flanders) depicts Amerigo Vespucci newly arrived on American soil. It is preeminently a work of propaganda for the European expansion that depicts the feminized and subordinate America with a symbolic accompaniment of native fauna and even, in the background, a spit over which indigenes are portrayed as cannibals roasting their human food.

The sighting of a few minor similarities between *Life of a Hunter* and Galle's two earlier engravings of course tells us very little about the meaning(s) attached by either Galle or Potter to their respective creations. All three depict animals (human and other). Two prominently depict animals conducting a trial of human



hunters. Is it possible that the major narrative of *Life of a Hunter* is a satire on the early modern practice of prosecuting animals for their crimes, such as pigs who had been winterised indoors and who happened to roll over in the middle of the night and smother a human infant? Although no animal trials were recorded in The Netherlands in E.P. Evans's haphazard compendium *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (1906), at least two such cases have been identified there. Perhaps Potter was aware of the details of these proceedings. One trial is said to have happened in 1571 in Middelburg. In this proceeding a bull was prosecuted after he had killed a woman by stabbing her in the stomach with his horns. How the bull was executed is unknown, though his head was displayed in public and his flesh was divided among the poor and those in prison. Another trial took place in Leiden in 1595, as a result of which a dog was hanged for having bitten a child (Fuchs, 1957: 5-8).

Why did Potter depict animals that put a hunter on trial, convicted him, executed him and hanged his dogs? Why also in his fable *Story of the Birds* did Cyrano de Bergerac contemporaneously – in 1650 – describe much the same sort of animal-conducted trial of a human, the anagrammatic Dyrcona? For neither case is there any convincing evidence. If *Life of a Hunter* actually represented Potter's satiric view of such animal trials, we remain in the dark. We don't even know whether Potter knew of these trials or, if he did, what his views of them might have been.

## Art and Politics

The small handful of Anglophone art historians who have examined *Life of a Hunter* seem to agree that it is an allegory of the chaotic political situation in the mid-seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Perhaps Potter's message in *Life of a Hunter* is the not-too-veiled threat of what might happen to an afflicted people when they rise up against a bellicose leader. It is no accident, so this view goes, that Potter executed *Life of a Hunter* at the very time when the states, especially Amsterdam, were becoming restless in the face of the expensive military ambitions of the young Stadtholder, Prince Willem II (Walsh, Buijsen & Broos, 1994: 127; and Kemp, 2007: 103-104). Potter's putative warning: he who treats his fellow creatures aggressively risks similar treatment in return! Thus, interpreting the scene at the top centre of *Life of a Hunter*, Martin Kemp speaks of the 'calm and judicious hunter... who looks directly out at the spectator [and who] has been identified as a portrait of Count Johann Maurits' (2007: 103-104). Moreover, from the left distance the hunter is fast approached by a messenger – a vignette interpreted to signify news of an invitation for the Count to lead Holland out of its political quagmire. As it happened, no such invitation was made and the office of Stadtholder was left open.

An inevitable corollary of the interpretation above is the suggestion that, 'clearly designed and rapidly executed,' *Life of a Hunter* was directly commissioned in 1650 by Count Maurits to stand as 'a kind of allegorical manifesto, speaking of his intention to rule with moderation' (Kemp, 2007: 103-104). Clearly, something more needs to be said about how in this case a commission for a work of art by

Paulus Potter might influence its production. Let us offer two comments on this, one leaving considerable room for speculation, the other closing it altogether.

Firstly, if performed skilfully and with an eye for consumer preference, the occupation of painter might have led to upward social mobility in the Dutch Golden Age (Van Deursen, 2010). It is probable that the painting of animals carried little social prestige, especially at a time when the upper echelons of Dutch society – the nobility, the landowners and the emergent bourgeoisie – were beginning to commission and collect painted representations of themselves. Individual or group portraiture, though dull, might have been more profitable and more enviable work than animal depictions. But perhaps paid commissions not much mattered to Potter; he came from a well-to-do family of glassmakers and married into another of wealthy builders. It is worth adding that Potter's prospective father-in-law, van Balckeneynde, at first opposed his daughter's marriage because young Paulus chose to represent animals rather than humans in his paintings (Houbraken, 1753). As it happened, friends and high placed contacts came to Potter's rescue and assured Van Balckeneynde that Potter was a well-respected and talented artist. Soon enough, Van Balckeneynde introduced Potter to The Hague's social elite, whose deep pockets were well placed to bid for Potter's time and brushwork. (Indeed, Potter is known to have once received a commission from Princess Amalia van Solms – the wife and widow of stadtholder Frederik Hendrik of Orange – though the finished canvas created a minor scandal and was rejected after the artist placed a urinating cow in it: Buijsen, Dumas et al., 1998.)

Unfortunately, as is the case with many other Dutch paintings, it is usually unclear with Potter's art if the terms of a particular commission demanded a specific content or style agreed on with the artist in advance. Though according to art historians, *Life of a Hunter* was probably commissioned by Maurits or by a person in Maurits' circles, it must be said that because of his growing reputation and increasing wealth, Potter was likely not altogether dependent on commissions and therefore sometimes able to paint what he pleased. Yet it is a quite different issue that leads us to believe that Potter did not paint *Life of a Hunter* with a commission from Maurits. Convention generally has it that the date of production of *Life of a Hunter* was 'c. 1650' (for example, Walsh, 1994; Walsh, Buijsen & Broos, 1994). This is a big 'c(irca)', however, because the website of the Hermitage museum – which owns and exhibits the painting and for some unknown reason chooses to entitle it *The Punishment of the Hunter* – claims that it dates back to 'c. 1647'.<sup>5</sup> If 1647 is accepted as accurate, then this date is critical to the painting's meaning, since Frederick Henry of Orange died in 1647. By then, because of his pursuit of freedom of religion, his encouragement of trade and industry and his construction projects, he had regained much respect for the House of Orange. Within a few years his son William II would squander much of that good reputation. Of course, neither this nor any other turn of events could possibly have been foreseen in 1647.

5 This claim by the Hermitage is available at: [www.hermitagemuseum.org](http://www.hermitagemuseum.org).

## Hunting Worlds Turned Upside Down

If Potter actually did produce *Life of a Hunter* as early as 1647, yet another interpretation of its meaning is required. In trying to understand *Life of a Hunter*, we began with the grisly death of Actaeon, who was mistaken by his own hunting dogs for a stag and ripped to pieces. The ancient Greeks termed such an inversion of normal everyday practices *adynaton* ('impossible').

Moving forward, consider the dynamic, self-styled World Upside Down tradition ('WUD') that began with twelfth- and thirteenth-century stories of half-animal/half-human characters and which circulated as burlesque at carnivals, in plays and in taverns throughout much of Europe (Kunzle, 1978; Stallybrass, 1991). Often responding to natural disasters or to perceived social injustice, cheaply produced woodcut WUD prints expressed the hopes and aspirations of the downtrodden for overturning existing social hierarchies, especially those in politics and in relations between men and women. Sometimes, WUDs were altogether serious. Here their meaning is fairly explicit – when they depicted role reversals in families, for example, with women assuming dominant roles, such as weapon-toting wives, or children instructing parents. At other times, WUDs were chiefly comical – when their visual puns took the form of nonsense, re-worked proverbs or satire. Here, their meaning is much harder for us to fathom. The animals who were represented in WUDs were often of the comical sort: animals with objects (e.g., hay chasing a donkey), or animals with other animals (e.g., mice chasing cats), or animals with humans (e.g., coachmen pulling a carriage of horses).

WUDs had been familiar fare in The Netherlands since at least 1485, when Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer translated the epic tale of Reynaert, the wily half-human fox (Varty, 2003). The Dutch had no difficulty construing Reynaert's adventures as comedic criticism of the goings-on of life at court. During the Dutch Revolt (1568-1648) against Spain, Reynaert's story gained a following when, depicted as reading aloud a list of complaints at a trial, he was popularly imagined to be criticizing cruel and unjust rule.<sup>6</sup> In a rare piece of scholarship on WUDs (Kunzle, 1978: 55-56), Potter's *Life of a Hunter* is identified as belonging to this category. It certainly looks like a WUD. Like *Life of a Hunter*, many WUDs are grid-like, with a minimum of 12 panels and as many as 25. Potter's had 14. Most of the 60 or so broadsheet WUDs examined in Kunzle's essay have inscribed at their footers *mundus inversus*, *mondo alla rovescia*, *monde à l'envers*, *mundo al revés*, *verkehrte welt* or *omgekeerde wereld*. But there is no *omgekeerde wereld* attached to *Life of a Hunter*. Perhaps it is, after all, an artistic if impenetrable comment on the state of Dutch politics. Yet there are no obvious textual clues that we can use to pierce its silence in this respect.

If we can agree that *Life of a Hunter* is a WUD, then we should also examine whether Potter cast his creation as satire or comedy or a combination of both (as many creations by Hieronymous Bosch and by Pieter Brueghel pointedly were, for example). Perhaps *Life of a Hunter* is a satire. If so, then what is its object – Dutch

6 See further the interesting explanation for Reynaert's upside down trial given by the *Reynaert Association*, available at: [www.reynaertgenootschap.be](http://www.reynaertgenootschap.be).

politics, animal trials or the moral dilemmas of hunting practices, to name only a few? If *Life of a Hunter* is a comedy, then at what does it poke fun – a foolish hunter caught by his prey, perhaps, or the notion that animals are able to converse and follow legal procedure? Again, there is no obvious answer.

We might also ask if *Life of a Hunter* is a WUD that expresses Potter's contempt for hunting and for other forms of animal cruelty. (We cannot deny it: on first inspection, we expected that *Life of a Hunter* would turn out to be an unheralded marker in the history of anti-cruelty sentiments!) If so, then Potter might well have been voicing that very same oppositional sentiment in *Wild Boar Hunt in a Forest* (1641) and *The Bear Hunt* (1649). That is, these two fierce and gory artworks might represent *both* glorification of the hunt *and* a measure of sympathy for the hunted. Alternatively, to repeat a question posed by Walsh, Buijsen & Broos (1994: 134), does this suggest a choice between a lust for hunting and the laying down of arms? Indeed, it is possible to suspect that, owing to Potter's tendency to favour the depiction of animals with lifelikeness and graphic detail, and without explicit symbolism, his labours reflected a deeply-felt respect or admiration for his fellow creatures and an interest in animals in themselves and for their own sakes. Perhaps that is a bit of a stretch.



3. Paulus Potter, *Wild Boar Hunt in a Forest* (c. 1649)

### Conclusion

Were our tentative interpretation of *Life of a Hunter* correct, then Paulus Potter's painting becomes an important visual marker in the lengthy trajectory against

animal cruelty which arose with Michel de Montaigne's essays in late sixteenth-century France. In his well-known *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, Montaigne had opposed and contradicted the ingrained belief that we humans are superior to all other animals: 'The natural distemper of Man is presumption...When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not passing time with me rather than I with her?' (Montaigne, 1580/1987: 16-17).

Through the Calvinist precept that we humans have a God-given obligation to act with care towards our fellow creatures, Montaigne's strictures against animal cruelty quickly travelled elsewhere – to England and The Netherlands, in particular. His writings were undoubtedly influential in The Netherlands during Potter's era (Ellerbroek, 1948). Indeed, strong evidence for Montaigne's popularity is lodged in Dutch library auction catalogues published in the seventeenth century; one study has found that Montaigne's name appears in 38 per cent of 211 seventeenth-century auction catalogues from private libraries in The Netherlands (Smith, 2007). Although we are not privy to precisely which texts were owned and read by painters like Potter, it is known that there was a Dutch tendency to emblemise Montaigne's essays. The painter Pieter van Veen, for example, was especially interested in the animals described in Montaigne's *Apology for Raymond Sebond*. In a collection of 191 illustrations by van Veen, 87 referred to the *Apology* and 19 depicted animals as their subject, including an illustration of Montaigne's famous question about the possible subjectivity of the playing cat (Smith, 2007; Kolfin & Rikken, 2007).

Though we might not wish to go quite as far as the art historian Martin Kemp did when he suggested, about *Life of a Hunter*, that '[t]he whole of the Dutch painter's canvas has a very Montaignean feel to it' (2007: 115), aspects of Potter's canvas nevertheless do seem to lead towards that interpretation. In our view, however, to go further than this would surely risk anachronism. Potter's painting expresses a moment of transition in cultural attitudes towards human-animal relationships: its restricted vision of animal cruelty is not against animal abuse *tout court* and its inversion of two links in the accepted great chain of being is very far from being altogether pro-animal.

This essay began with the admission of our inability clearly to distinguish among cultural criminology, green criminology and visual criminology. Nonetheless, we believe that our indecision in this regard is actually a good omen for the continued prosperity of these three perspectives. After quite a lengthy hiatus, criminology once again has a creative and intermingling set of perspectives that is inter- or multi-disciplinary in origin and content, and potentially subversive in its effects. We hope that we have shown the need for criminology to pay attention to media that it has thus far been only rarely addressed, namely, the historico-cultural situation of works of art and their aesthetic properties and patterns of production and consumption.<sup>7</sup>

7 For a similar plea recently entered in respect of the cultural productions of playwrights and the social context of their performance (Beirne & O'Donnell, 2010: 47).



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